



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

27th Sunday of Ordinary Time | Year B



Carl Heinrich Bloch, *Jesus Christ with Children*, 1800's



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy. (Found in your parish Sacramentary.)

Option: Use the prayer provided below.

*THE PRAYER,
O LORD MY GOD
(By Saint Anselm.)*

O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.

You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.

Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.

Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
Version 2.0

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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

Today's liturgy continues the slow movement toward the fulfillment of Jesus' ministry that we will proclaim and manifest in the weeks ahead as the liturgical year winds down.

- ▶ Today Jesus illustrates his great care for husband and wife and for the dignity and respect we must show to children. He reminds us that the kingdom of God belongs to them.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?

First Reading: Genesis 2: 18-24

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ This reading from Genesis relates the story of God's creation of man and woman.
- ▶ There are two versions of the creation story.
- ▶ One was written by the Priestly tradition and the other by the Jahwist tradition.
- ▶ The Jahwist (J) has also been called the Yahwist tradition. The Jahwist tradition is one of several sources of the Torah (the first five books of the Bible).
- ▶ Both words--Jahwist and Yahwist--simply refer to God's name.
- ▶ The Jahwist tradition uses the name Yahweh (the Jewish name for God) more than any other tradition, which is why it is named as it is. This tradition dates back to about the seventh century before Christ.
- ▶ The Priestly (P) tradition is another source of the Torah. (In addition to the J and P source, there are also two other sources known as the Elohist (E) and the Deuteronomist (D). Scholars believe that the Priestly tradition dates back to the period following the Babylonian exile (@5th century before Christ) when Judah was controlled by Persia.
- ▶ The primary focus of the Priestly tradition was to communicate God's care, love, providence and presence even when it seemed that all hope was lost.
- ▶ The P tradition relates the story at the end of God's creative work.
- ▶ The J tradition relates it in the center.
- ▶ The P account has God making human beings after he created the animals.
- ▶ The J account relates that man was created first and woman was made from man's flesh.
- ▶ The animals follow and God gave human beings dominion over them.
- ▶ The text insists that woman is created from the rib of the man, conveying that there is a commonality between men and woman.
- ▶ The story of the rib was intended to explain why the man leaves his home in order to marry the woman.
- ▶ Men and women share a complementarity with one another. The man completes the woman and the woman completes the man.
- ▶ "One flesh" refers to complete physical and spiritual unity—the totality of persons—the virtues and the flaws.
- ▶ Flesh is another word for the totality of human nature.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What does the Biblical belief in the complementarity of men and women that is reflected in the statement: “The man completes the woman and the woman completes the man” mean to you?
- ▶ How do you feel about the fact that there are two creation stories? What does that teach us about Sacred Scripture? (The fact that there are two different creation stories is a reminder that some stories and books in the Bible are various literary genres that have as their purpose to illustrate how God is in relationship with the human race and are thus less concerned with factual details.)
- ▶ What does this reading teach us about God’s intention for marriage?

Second Reading: Hebrews 2:9-11

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings; simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ **The author of Hebrews teaches his community about Jesus the ultimate High Priest.**
- ▶ High Priests in Israel were always from the tribe of Levi.
- ▶ The author of Hebrews makes the case for the High Priesthood of Jesus even though he was not a Levite.
- ▶ The author insists that Jesus possessed the requisite pedigree to assume this exalted role.
- ▶ 1. Jesus was fully human and was thus in solidarity with all human beings.
- ▶ 2. Jesus was also divine and thus existed throughout eternity—he was/is God’s Son who always existed. Jesus was present at the dawn of creation and was the author of that creation.
- ▶ When the author insists that Jesus was made perfect by his sacrificial death, he means that Jesus fulfilled the mission he was destined to fulfill.
- ▶ The word *perfect* has nothing to do with a value judgment; in order to define *perfect* in a moral sense one would have to conclude that Jesus was not morally upright from the very beginning.
- ▶ It is thus clear that *perfect* had nothing to do with how we understand perfect as *without fault*.
- ▶ Jesus was perfected—his saving mission was accomplished—through his death and resurrection.
- ▶ Jesus became the great High Priest by virtue of the salvation of human beings he

brought about by the sacrifice of his life. As Great High Priest he intercedes for us—he ransomed our lives--before his Father.

- ▶ In order to intercede for us it was necessary that he truly understood human frailty, infirmity and foibles, thus he took human flesh and became one with all things human except human sin.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ What does it mean to you that Jesus had to understand human frailty in order to intercede for us before his Father?
- ▶ What were Jesus' qualifications to be our Great High Priest?
- ▶ Why is it Good News that Jesus is our great High Priest? What does that mean for our lives?

Gospel: Mark 10: 2-16

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

For those catechists who prefer an abbreviated interpretation of the Gospel refer to the bulleted points that follow and then choose questions for your reflection found at the end of end of the entire exegesis. (Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.)

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Abbreviated treatment of the Gospel:

- ▶ As Jesus continues his journey to Jerusalem Mark raises the stakes, supplies mounting tension, and foreshadows Jesus' imminent encounter with his enemies.
- ▶ Jesus meets Pharisees who try to trap him by raising the issue of divorce. Jesus will not be fooled into entering into a rigid argument about divorce. He simply appeals to God's will.
- ▶ Jesus reminds the Pharisees that divorce should not be the focus of their debate. The real issue is God's original intention for marriage. God's will for marriage is rooted in God's creation of the world. God entered into a covenant with human beings at the creation of the world. Human beings enter into that reciprocal relationship by living that covenant in all human relationships—the love between

husband and wife, the love human beings have for one another, and the love they have for the oppressed and marginalized members of the human family.

- ▶ Jesus insists that loving and harmonious covenantal family life is an important value in the reign he came to establish.
- ▶ Marriage is rooted more in covenant love than in physical union.
- ▶ Covenant love answers the question why a man leaves his parent's home and marries a woman and enters into a life-long covenant of mutual care and love for one another.
- ▶ Marriage is rooted in the Two Great Commandments—love that should guide all human relationships.
- ▶ The ideal intended by God is that the marriage relationship be rooted in unconditional love. Yet when that love falls short, God's ideal antidote is for both parties to enter into mutual forgiveness and reconciliation.
- ▶ When the wounds of rupture are deep and irreparable, divorce could be the only realistic solution. But in the ideal world of covenant love, it should be regarded the ultimate last resort.
- ▶ Jesus' teaching about marriage is absolute. He defers to God's divine will for the marriage bond. There are, however, indications in sources later than Mark in the New Testament that exceptions to the absolute situations did exist. (See 1 Cor. 7:10-16.)
- ▶ As all good storytellers Mark writes tension and drama into his narrative. Jesus is on his way to his torture and death. His enemies lie in wait. The religious authorities plot to trap him in heretical arguments they could use against him.
- ▶ Divorce was a heavily debated topic. The Old Testament was not definitive in its legislation in relation to it. The only rules were the prohibition against the remarriage of divorced couples and the allowance of a husband to divorce his wife in the case of scandal.
- ▶ The husband simply had to write a decree of divorce against his wife. She, however, was left with no recourse whatsoever.
- ▶ The debate of the day revolved around two approaches.
- ▶ Followers of Rabbi Hillel's (50 BC-20 AD) position included situations beyond the temple--everyday life circumstances. Hillel asserted that scandalous acts included acts such as poor cooking skills, talking to another man in public, and complaining about the wife's husband's parents to other people—and thus was his list of transgressions multiplied.
- ▶ Rabbi Shammai, on the other hand, was deeply rooted in the Temple. He appealed to the Torah and the Book of Deuteronomy that stated that a man may divorce his wife for scandalous behavior.
- ▶ Shammai interpreted that to mean adultery. A woman, therefore, would have to be guilty of adultery for a husband to divorce her and remove her from his home.
- ▶ Jesus refused to get trapped by such trifling, distracting banter.
- ▶ Rather than discuss loopholes to the law Jesus deferred to the question of marriage and not divorce. He used the debate as a teachable moment.
- ▶ The Pharisees insisted that even Moses allowed divorce. Jesus did not deny their

claim. He simply insisted that Moses allowed it because of the sin, and will-full disobedience of God's people. Their hearts were closed to God's word and thus were unable to live according to God's original intention for marriage.

- ▶ The Deuteronomy teaching was not establishing a law about marriage and divorce—it was allowing a concession to it in light of the arrogance and sinfulness of the people.
- ▶ Divorce was a response and a concession to human sin and weakness. God intended covenant love and harmony. Human beings thwarted God's original intention.
- ▶ Jesus conceded that Moses was responding to the reality of human sin; what he proscribed, however, was not what God intended.
- ▶ Jesus upheld God's plan for husband and wife established at the creation of the world.

This brings the abbreviated interpretation to a close. Refer to the questions at the end of the entire exegesis and choose the appropriate questions for your reflection.

Further elaboration of the Gospel:

The following exegesis is provided for your further and continued reflection.

- ▶ In addition to the above material there are several other interesting elements in this Gospel for our reflection.
- ▶ Jesus continued his teaching when he was alone and in private with his disciples. He reminded them that marriage after divorce is prohibited because the first bond from the first marriage was still valid. The bond was never broken.
- ▶ Jesus went further than Jewish law when he insisted that in such a case even the man would be guilty of adultery.
- ▶ Roman law allowed women to divorce their husbands in the case of adultery. Thus, scholars have suggested that Mark places this allowance on Jesus' lips as a pastoral response to the Gentile Christians among them.
- ▶ Scholars suggest that in this instance Mark was pastorally addressing the cultural situation in which Roman law permitted wives to divorce their husbands, thus adapting to the experience and needs of the Gentile Christians.
- ▶ Biblical scholarship suggests that the reason for Jesus' absolute teaching on marriage is that he thought the parousia was imminent. If that had been so, then arguments about divorce were irrelevant.
- ▶ In light of the parousia's delay the Church/disciples were faced with the reality of dealing with the effects of ongoing human sin and the impact that sin had on God's original intention for marriage.
- ▶ We can observe in the New Testament that concessions that were made were made by a living community/Church with the authority to pastorally address such situations.
- ▶ Jesus' teaching was revolutionary. He proposed equality between men and women; such a concept was foreign to first century consciousness.
- ▶ Jesus' teaching is a reminder that even though divorce is a sad, abhorrent reality, justice must still be upheld within the structures that legislate it. Both parties' rights

and responsibilities must be taken into consideration.

- ▶ The inclusion of the segment regarding children is believed to have baptismal roots and address the issue of infant baptism in the early years of Christianity. The word “hinder” was a word commonly used in relation to baptism; it was a word that referred to the exhortation not to hinder anyone seeking baptism. There are echoes of a baptismal rite in this passage so that hypothesis makes perfect sense.
- ▶ Jesus reminds his followers that the reign of God must be embraced in simplicity—just as children embrace it.
- ▶ Jesus sent the disciples (his children) out to bring the Good News to the people. Those who received it were welcomed; those who did not were to be shaken from their sandals.
- ▶ Children are the ones who witness against those who refuse to accept the reign of God.
- ▶ Children were low ranking members of first century society. The disciples tried to keep them away from Jesus; he was aggravated by their attempts.
- ▶ Once again Jesus turned the tables on the societal status quo of the day—another reason he garnered so much angst by his detractors. Whenever status quo apple carts are overturned, feathers become ruffled and those on the top have a vested interest in keeping those on the bottom in their place. It is no wonder people plotted against Jesus.
- ▶ Jesus heralded the children as first in the kingdom. No longer were they to assume the role of status-less citizens in the new kingdom. They now enjoyed equal status.
- ▶ Children were numbered among the poor and oppressed and marginalized of that society. They were the victims of the world’s power structures.
- ▶ Jesus reversed that order and reminded his followers that not only are they now first, they were to be a model for all disciples.
- ▶ We are all to receive and embrace the reign of God with the same receptivity that children possess.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ What is the lesson in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the primary themes in this Gospel?
- ▶ How do you feel about Jesus’ insistence that God’s intention for marriage is harmony, unity and complementarity?
- ▶ How does our culture understand Christian marriage?

- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about marriage and divorce?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel challenge and affirm your own marriage or the marriage of someone close to you?
- ▶ In light of this Gospel, how would you define a true sacramental marriage?
- ▶ What does Jesus' welcome of the children teach us in this Gospel?
- ▶ What are the lessons for family life in this Gospel?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel challenge you personally in your own family situation?
- ▶ What does this Gospel teach us about the Church's role in annulments today?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

THE PRAYER, O LORD MY GOD

(By Saint Anselm.)

*O Lord my God.
Teach my heart this day
where and how to find you.*

*You have made me and re-made me,
and you have bestowed on me
all the good things I possess,
and still I do not know you.
I have not yet done
that for which I was made.*

*Teach me to seek you,
for I cannot seek you
unless you teach me,
or find you
unless you show yourself to me.*

*Let me seek you in my desire;
let me desire you in my seeking.
Let me find you by loving you;
let me love you when I find you.*

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

Appendix

- In what way does this Gospel challenge and affirm your own marriage or the marriage of someone close to you?

I defer to an earlier witness I gave a few weeks ago regarding my own marriage. I have been married to the same man for forty-three years. He is a good man. To know him is to love him. To say that every year, every month, or every week has been an exercise in wedded bliss would be a gross exaggeration, however. We, like all marriages, have had our moments of pain, sorrow, anger, resentment and every other human emotion a couple can conjure.

Someone once said that true love is a decision. Just like Jesus invites us to make a decision for him, I believe Christian marriage asks the same decision for one another—day in and day out. Just as St. Augustine told us the Eucharist is the repeatable sacrament of initiation, so too is the marriage covenant the ongoing, repeatable sacrament of love and service. Sacramental marriage begs the question: “Will we make a decision for love, no matter how it feels at the moment?”

I am sure there were times my husband would have loved to throw me over a cliff (as long as there was a soft mattress waiting for me on the way down). There have been times that I acted as though my entire happiness was on his shoulders. Everything that was wrong in the household certainly had to be his fault, not mine.

As God is wont to do, he opened my eyes to this pervasive sin and invited me on a journey of appreciation. Who is this man I love and with whom I have shared four beautiful children and five amazing grandchildren? Where is love found in our relationship?

Again, sitting on my new porch swing this week, I asked myself that question. Where has love been found and how has this been a sacramental marriage? When and how has my husband lived what was just proclaimed in this text? When did he love me as Christ loves the Church? When did I love and honor him as I am called to do?

I think back to the moment of illness and the moments of despair; I remember him as a voice of hope no matter how bleak the situation. I remember him taking on a horrible, unmentionable task when I simply could not do it one more time. I never loved him more than in that moment. He did it because he knew I could not. He laid down his life for me. That is how Christ loves his Church.

I remember the time he almost died and years later when I almost died and the two of us exchanged glances of communion and knowing, and the words, “I love you,” meant more than soap opera, puppy love, but carried deep within them a history of family—a family baptized by fire but strengthened and forged in the crucible of love and faith. The “I love you” we shared embodied years of self-emptying (his self and myself) reflecting

Jesus' own kenosis on the cross.

Anyone who knows me would hardly call me submissive. I am however, aware that we are partners and that together we have forged a life that has required both of us to lay down our lives for one another. Marriage is the laboratory in which the Paschal Mystery is practiced and lived. If we can't lay down our lives for our spouses, then how do we hope to do it for others in the world?

I could cite so many instances of simply being cherished by the one who God put in my life. I am blessed. Is he perfect? Hardly. Is he an example of the love of Christ in my life? Absolutely. I know I am unconditionally loved. There will always be things that drive us both crazy, but we have made the choice to be faithful to one another and to God. We have made the choice to love one another (albeit imperfectly) and to commit our lives to each other and to our life in Christ. The road has been bumpy at times, thrilling at times, joy-filled at times, but always graced.

So many times it could have been easy to throw in the towel and say enough. This is hard work. Yes, it is hard work. Sadly we live in an age where throw away marriages are as prevalent as throw away containers. Young people go into marriage thinking this will be their starter marriage. When the going gets tough they simply stop going and want to get off the train. If only they could weather the storm they would discover that love grows over the years, love grows as people change, love grows as we discover the warts in one another and find them OK.

In truth there are many situations in which one or the other person is simply not capable of forging the covenant expressed in today's readings, and for them divorce is the only option and sometimes God even leads them to that place.

But for those who are able to weather the storms and commit to a self-emptying love, there can be amazing grace and peace in their lives no matter the storms that come. The Christian life is an awesome journey.

Yes, we are asked to make a choice. Sometimes those choices are difficult to make, but always with the grace of God we can be confident that he will lead us in those choices.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Genesis 2: 18-24 | Hebrews 2: 9-11 | Mark 10: 2-16

Sacrament of Matrimony
Jesus Christ
Salvation/Soteriology
Mary Model for the Church

Jesus Christ
Catholic Social Teaching
Eucharist Series

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY

Jesus is asked a question about divorce. As far as Jesus is concerned it is the wrong question; the issue is really about marriage. God's intention for marriage is based on creation—God created men and women to be in covenantal love. Today's Gospel is a wonderful springboard to focus our attention today on what the Church teaches about the SACRAMENT OF MATRIMONY. The fruit of that love is the welcoming of children into the family system--the owner's messenger sent to collect the rent was killed in the parable Jesus told in today's Gospel. It is an allusion to the Lord's prophets who throughout history have been killed in service of their Lord and God. It is the fate of all faithful disciples. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on the ultimate prophet and Savior who gave his life for the many. Today's session will address the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

JESUS CHRIST

The author of Hebrews exalts the eschatological high priesthood of Jesus—that he sits from the throne of God as the ultimate High Priest. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on the ultimate prophet and Savior who gave his life for the many and now sits at the right hand of God as High Priest. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches us about JESUS CHRIST.

CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY

The author of Hebrews exalts the eschatological high priesthood of Jesus—that he sits from the throne of God as the ultimate High Priest. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on the ultimate prophet and Savior who gave his life for the many and now sits at the right hand of God as High Priest. We are all called to reflect on the great mystery of Jesus death and resurrection and the salvation that was opened to us through that great sacrifice. It is thus fitting that we focus our attention today on what the Church teaches us about the CROSS AND PASCHAL MYSTERY.

SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY

The author of Hebrews exalts the eschatological high priesthood of Jesus—which he sits from the throne of God as the ultimate High Priest. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention today on the effects of what the ultimate prophet and Savior who gave his life for the many and now sits at the right hand of God as High Priest accomplished for all humanity—salvation. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about SALVATION/SOTERIOLOGY.

MARY MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

October is the month we remember and honor the Virgin Mary, Mother of God and model disciple. It is thus appropriate we focus our attention this month and in today's session on MARY, MODEL DISCIPLE.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

Jesus hearkens back to God's intention for marriage since the creation of the world. He upholds the dignity of each person in the marriage covenant—the dignity afforded to each human person at the creation of men and women at the creation of the world—the equality of men and women. The Church's social teaching is based on the dignity of each person. It is thus appropriate that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

EUCCHARIST SERIES:

Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. Thus any Sunday would be an appropriate time to focus our attention on the Eucharistic liturgy. This week we continue the series on the Mass. Today we will focus on part ____ of the Eucharistic Series.